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SUBJECT: SSR IN THE DRC: EMBASSY CONVENES GREAT LAKES
CONTACT GROUP COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: We convened a meeting of the DCMs and DATTs from the Great Lakes Contact Group countries and organizations on May 4 to hold a discussion on the way forward on SSR (defined as military reform issues for the purposes of this meeting) and to generate field input for the upcoming Contact Group meetings in Brussels. We posed two key questions to the group in order to generate discussion: how to ensure full GDRC buy-in for SSR and how can donor countries and organizations better coordinate between themselves? On the former, considerable skepticism was expressed that the GDRC is intent on meaningful military reform. There was inconclusive debate on the latter question, though a number of representatives underlined the importance of establishing a monitoring committee (comite de suivi) for the military reform process. As this structure would bring together both the government and all donor countries, it would seemingly solve the coordination problem.
End summary.

Representation

¶2. (SBU) Present at this meeting were representatives from the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, Belgium, the European Commission, and MONUC. The DCM, DATT, OSC Chief, and PolOff represented the USG.

Embassy Presentation

¶3. (SBU) The DCM emphasized that the principal purpose of the meeting was to consider two questions: how to ensure full GDRC buy-in for SSR (which he emphasized would be defined as military reform issues for the purposes of this meeting) and how can donor countries and organizations better coordinate between themselves. He invited those present, after the conclusion of the meeting, to send their official comments to the embassy in writing, which will be synthesized into one document. The DATT then delivered a powerpoint presentation which included an overview of current U.S. coordination initiatives (e.g. the liaison officer at EUSEC, MIST coordination with MONUC, U.S.-UK collaboration at GESM) and the USG philosophy for SSR efforts in the DRC. The latter emphasizes a focus on specific problems, avoidance of duplication, being receptive to coordination with partners and possible preparation for future cooperation with partners.

GDRC Buy-In

¶4. (SBU) Meeting participants expressed considerable skepticism that the GDRC is intent on meaningful military reform. It is not a "vote-getter" and there are many entrenched interests that will oppose it because it threatens

their incomes and privileges. The Belgian DCM noted that SSR is not a part of the five key reform efforts formulated by the Kabila administration (known as the "cinq chantiers," which are mostly related to economic or infrastructure issues) and thus is not a priority for the government. He acknowledged, however, that the current MOD is at least better and more open than his predecessor. He indicated that the Belgian Government is leaning towards focusing on the social needs of the FARDC, such as lodging for families. The French DATT pointed out that while the FARDC "intellectually" favors the concept of SSR -- in the sense that it would bring them better lodging conditions, better equipment and regularly-paid salaries -- in practice many officers benefit from the current corrupt system and want to keep it in place. The Belgian PolOff suggested that there is an unwillingness at senior levels of the GDRC to undertake SSR.

15. (SBU) The French DATT said as well that real reform will not even be feasible until the conflict in the east is over, as it is not possible to reform an army in the middle of major operations. He stated that the FARDC is more concerned with the outcome of Kimia II than SSR. For all of these reasons, most participants were of the view that the best way to proceed is to apply "band-aids," enacting mini-reforms as opportunities arise, while also continuing to press the GDRC for long-term SSR.

Donor Coordination

16. (SBU) There was inconclusive debate about how we should

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organize ourselves to help the GDRC pursue SSR. MONUC's Senior PolOff pointed that the donor community needs to tread lightly in coordination efforts, as the Congolese political class is suspicious overall of the international community and sees "coordination" through the prism of the much maligned CIAT (the International Committee in Support of the Transition, often accused of usurping Congolese sovereignty).

The Dutch and French DATTs underlined the importance of establishing a monitoring committee (comite de suivi) for the military reform process. Because such a structure would bring together the government and all donor countries, it would seemingly solve the coordination problem. The UK DATT suggested that MONUC would be well-placed to coordinate short-term, "band-aid" efforts. MONUC's PolOff concurred, but emphasized that MONUC cannot run long-term coordination efforts, not least of which because MONUC should not be around for the long-term.

17. (SBU) Comment: There is clearly little confidence on the part of donor countries and organizations here as to the successful prospects of long-term SSR. While most of them will likely carry on nevertheless with planning for the long-term, this meeting and others have provided indications that some donors want to focus on the band-aid approach. MONUC, for example, is developing a "mini-SSR" plan for the Kivus, which aims to consolidate the integration process and improve the efficiency and discipline of the FARDC there by, for example, constructing barracks, providing basic supplies and equipment, and encouraging families to settle in proximity of the garrisons. The UK and Netherlands are also geared up to address the problems of pay, food, and lodging for the FARDC in the Kivus, which threaten to unravel the whole integration process. As for donor coordination, there does not seem to be much appetite in Kinshasa for constructing robust mechanisms that do not include government representatives; the meeting participants were clearly of the mind that it is the responsibility of the GDRC to take charge of this process, and that includes coordination. End comment.

GARVELINK